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ABSTRACT

An exploratory study of horizontal organizational structure investigated how the tasks in a public relations department are apportioned and why the structure is as it is. J. E. Grunig and T. Hunt's taxonomy of horizontal structures, which served as the framework for the research, suggests that the following structures are typical: by public, by management process, by communication technique, by geographic region, by account executive system, by organizational subsystem, and by combination of these methods. All represent a division of labor within the public relations department on a single level of authority. Forty-eight organizations in the Washington, D.C., area were surveyed--12 corresponding with each of the 4 cells in the Hage-Hull (1981) structural typology of organizations: traditional, mechanical, organic and mixed mechanical/organic. Eighty-seven public relations practitioners were interviewed, and their organizational publications were analyzed. Findings indicated that most public relations departments studied were organized by a combination of horizontal structures, predominantly by public, by technique, or by internal client. A few respondents reported a single horizontal structure, and about half said that their departments were significantly involved in marketing, advertising, or both. This was especially true for mechanical organizations, rarely occurring in traditional organizations. One major assumption was unsupported by the data: that horizontal structure of public relations departments would vary significantly by organizational type. No clear pattern of structure emerged. (A list of references is appended.) (NKA)

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HORIZONTAL STRUCTURE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF DEPARTMENTAL DIFFERENTIATION

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study of horizontal structure asks two questions: how are the tasks in a public relations department carved up and why is the structure as it is? The taxonomy of horizontal structures developed by J. Grunig and Hunt served as a framework for the research. Their experience had suggested that the following structures are typical: by public, by management process, by communication technique, by geographic region, by account executive system, by organizational subsystem and by combination of these methods. All represent a division of labor within the public relations department on a single level of authority.

Methodology was global--involving survey data, personal interviews with 87 public relations practitioners and an analysis of their organizational publications.

Forty-eight organizations in the Washington, DC, area were selected for the purposive sample--twelve corresponding with each of the four cells in the Hage-Hull structural typology of organizations. Each type represents an environmental niche. Traditional organizations have a low knowledge base and few employees. Mechanical organizations are large-scale, low-complexity structures. Organic organizations are small in scale but high in complexity. Mixed mechanical/organic organizations are large-scale, high-complexity operations.

Consistent with systems theory and structural-functionalism, the assumption was that horizontal structure would vary by organizational type. The study also measured the relationship between marketing and public relations and between advertising and public relations as a way of exploring the interdependency between communication subsystems in the organizational system.

Most PR departments studied are organized by a combination of horizontal structures--predominantly by public, by technique or by internal client. Only 12% reported a single horizontal structure, and that is by public. About 16% did not recognize their division of labor as any one of the possibilities suggested by the J. Grunig-Hunt taxonomy.

About half of all respondents said their department is significantly involved in marketing or advertising or both. This is especially the case in mechanical organizations. It happens least often in traditional organizations.

However, one major assumption of the study was unsupported: that horizontal structure of public relations departments would vary significantly by Hage-Hull organizational type. No clear pattern of structure--or relationship between structure and environmental niche--emerged. Two explanations were posited: 1) that two practitioners in a single organization might disagree on what their structure is because they fail to share a common definition of what pubic relations is; and 2) that the determination of horizontal structure may be an irrational one, dependent on dominant coalitions that may not include public relations practitioners among their members.

INTRODUCTION

In 1984, J. Grunig and Hunt devoted fewer than two pages in their book on public relations management to what they called "the division of labor on a single level of authority" (p. 101). Why such scant attention to the horizontal set-up of the typical public relations department? Did they consider structure relatively unimportant to the effectiveness of public relations? No. Although J. Grunig and Hunt considered this horizontal differentiation vital to the operation of a public relations subsystem within the larger organizational system, they could find no systematic studies or even anecdotal descriptions in this area.

To help fill that gap in the understanding of public relations practice, this paper reports the findings of an exploratory study of the horizontal structure of public relations departments in the Washington, DC, area. Research was conducted to answer two basic questions: how are the tasks in a public relations department carved up and why is the structure as it is? Methodology was global--involving survey data, personal interviews and an analysis of organizational publications.

Interpreting the findings of the study depends at least in part on an understanding of the following related areas: systems theory, the determinants of structure and both vertical and horizontal structure. Each will be dealt with in turn in the following conceptualization. After a description of the method employed and the findings that resulted, the paper concludes with implications for managers who need to design or to restructure

their public relations departments. By determining an appropriate horizontal structure, managers can help meet the needs of their organization in adapting to and dealing with the external environment.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

The Systems Perspective

Systems theory, although frequently criticized as too abstract to be applicable to the actual situations facing managers in organizations, provides a perspective critical to this study. Useful components of that perspective include its interdisciplinary nature; its assumptions about the interconnectedness of the system, its subsystems and its suprasystem; and its implications for contingency theory.

The interdisciplinary nature of systems theory is consistent with the approach this paper takes. In particular, the research presented here builds on the literature of organizational sociology and of business. The key concept of structure illustrates this theoretical melding.

"Structure" is a macro-level concept borrowed from sociology; it is equivalent to the micro-level concept of "design" described in the literature of business management. One prominent scholar of organizations, Robbins (1987), incorporated the two terms in the title of his recent text: Organization Theory: Structure, Design, and Applications. He explained that both terms encompass division of labor and a hierarchy of authority. However, "design" emphasizes the managerial process

associated with achieving organizational goals (pp. 5-6). The sociological perspective on structure, on the other hand, implies that no one person (even a top-level manager) is as important in configuring the organization as is the organization's dominant coalition.

Embracing the systems concept also leads to an appreciation of the interconnectedness or gestalt of organizations, their external environments and their internal departments. This holistic notion is especially important in any study of public relations, since one main function of this managerial subsystem is coordination. Understanding that the environment influences the organization, and vice versa, has implications for an interactive, balanced form of communication that J. Grunig (1984) called "two-way symmetrical." The goal of this model of public relations is cooperation between the organization and its relevant external publics.

Not all organizations, though, require such a sophisticated form of public relations. J. Grunig (1984) contended that some may be successful by adopting an imbalanced model, which he called "two-way asymmetrical." Still others may succeed when using the more anachronistic one-way forms of public relations: either "press agentry/publicity" or "public information." But how can a manager determine the most appropriate model of public relations for his or her organization?

Contingency theory provides the answer. Organization theory, in the systems perspective, concludes that different parts of the

organization may be structured in different ways contingent on the environment. Thus it stands to reason that different models of public relations may be adopted when dealing with different aspects of the organization's suprasystem, or its external environment. Some recent research validates this assumption.1 Might it not also be the case that different horizontal structures for public relations departments are appropriate in organizations with significantly different environments? The answer, from a contingency approach, is yes--that there is no single best way to organize.

Determinants of Structure

Organizational scholars such as Burns and Stalker (1961), Perrow (1967) and Hage and Aiken (1969) built upon the foundation laid by Weber (1947) in his early work in the structural paradigm.2 They first looked at technology (Woodward, 1965) and

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1 J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1986) recently presented a program of research that includes correlations between model of public relations practiced and dominant environment: political/regulatory, which emphasizes public affairs, and product/service, where public relations supports the marketing function. Studies they reviewed suggested that chosen domain did, at least to some extent, predict model of public relations--particularly when the emphasis in public relations is on marketing.

2 Weber's ideal construction, the bureaucracy, has been called the first structural-functional theory of organizations (Hage, 1980, p. 15). However, his bureaucracy must be considered one type of organization rather than a way to describe other organizational types by degree (Pugh et al., 1963, p. 296). As a result, other theorists searched for variables that might form a continuum of organizational types ranging between extremes that might include all organizations. See, for example, Burns and Stalker (1961), with their attempt at an inclusive continuum between the polar extremes they called "organic" and "mechanistic" managerial systems.

size (Pugh, Hickson, Hinings & Turner, 1968) as causes of social structure. Then, with the ensuing investigations of Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) and Thompson (1967), they added environmental factors into the equation.3

Thus this structural-functional school brings together the fragments of a field derived from different antecedent perspectives. It represents a logical and testable theory that integrates the limited conclusions of other scholars into generalizations that can benefit researchers and practitioners of public relations alike. It stresses the commonalities--rather than the differences--in organizations. Because of its emphasis on the relatively stable nature of concentration of power, it offers potent predictions.

The basic question structural-functionalism addresses is the same question Weber asked 40 years ago: what is the best form of organization and why? To answer, most structural theorists have tried to isolate structural variables that (unlike Weber's) are independent of any culture or historical period. Possible determinants of that structure are described below.

Environment. The environment, frequently mentioned above as a key factor, may be only one determinant of organizational

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3 In fact, as early as the 1950s Parsons (1956a, 1956b) had emphasized organizational interchanges with the environment as a means by which the organization obtains the resources necessary to legitimize its existence. As an advocate of the General Systems School, he agreed with Pareto (cited in Henderson, 1967) on the importance of an organization's equilibrium with its environment.

structure. In fact, Robbins (1987, Chapter 7) contended that the environment represents a significant contingency only when that environment is fraught with uncertainty. One important aspect of environmental uncertainty is dynamism. Thus, according to Robbins, structuring an organization dependent on its environment is more important with a dynamic than a static suprasystem. Given the rate of change in the environment for most organizations today, of course, dynamism is the assumption rather than the exception.

Strategy. Robbins (1987, Chapter 4) considered strategy, a second possible determinant of structure, of little importance. He explained that strategy, or an organization's plan to achieve its ends, impacts only certain structural dimensions rather than all aspects of organizational design. He further explained that empirical research on long-range planning and on patterns of decision making fail to support strategy as a major structural influence.

Organization Size. Size is a third determinant of organizational structure. Robbins (1987, Chapter 5) argued that the impact of the number of employees on structure is not clear--largely because most research in this area has been done on large- and medium-sized companies. However, he concluded that size alone is not a significant predictor of organizational structure. Instead, size seems to interact with factors that include organizational type, environment, technology, complexity and whether the size is growing or shrinking. Size alone affects

only certain dimensions of structure: vertical differentiation, formalization and decentralization.

Technology. Technology has been found to be more of an influence than an imperative on organizational structure. Contrasting these two possibilities helps make sense of a heterogenous body of research in both the technological and structural schools.

More than twenty years ago, Woodward (1965) contended that technology was the most critical variable in determining structure. Robbins (1987, Chapter 6) subsequently pointed out that because technology and structure are both multidimensional concepts, technology can have an important effect on structure without being imperative. Perhaps more insightful, Pfeffer (1978, p. 99) explained the relationship among technology, environment and structure when he talked about organizational management: "Choice of a domain, and a set of activities and tasks, tends to constrain the organization's technology, but the domain is still chosen." In other words, technology constrains managers because they have little choice over their organization's technological processes. They do have a choice of environment, however, and that environment influences their organizational activities.

Hage and Hull (1981) developed a structural typology of organizations wherein each organizational type develops within an environmental niche. They contended that two factors--scale and complexity--subsume other structural considerations. Scale represents the repetitiveness of events that characterize an

organization's operation rather than to a raw number such as employees, number of sales dollars or number of clients. Complexity refers to the technical sophistication or knowledge base inherent in that operation.

Juxtaposing these two variables results in four normative models4--each cell representing an environmental niche. That is, large scale of the environment is positively related to large size of the organization; low certainty; non-variability of environmental tasks; codified (analyzable) knowledge; and a stable, static environment. Small environmental scale is positively correlated with small organizational size; high environmental uncertainty; task variability; uncodified knowledge; and a shifting, dynamic environment. In addition to incorporating key structural components, then, this typology emphasizes the consequences of the environment on organizational structure--making it especially relevant to any study of horizontal differentiation.

"Traditional" or "craft" organizations have small scale and a low knowledge base. "Mechanical" organizations are large-scale, low complexity structures. "Organic" organizations are small in scale but high in complexity. "Mixed mechanical/organic" organizations are large-scale, high-complexity operations.5

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4 Hage and Hull based their work largely on the mechanistic-organic continuum first proposed by Burns and Stalker (1961).

5 Consistent with contingency theory is the qualification that different parts of an organization may be structured differently, dependent on the parts of the environment they interact with. For example, the R&D component of an organization

Aiken and Hage (1971) suggested that as the speed of technological change increases, so will cooperative relationships between an organization and its environment--via the communication link. This cooperative situation could encompass both organic and mixed mechanical/organic organizations, since both are characterized by high rates of knowledge change and growing complexity.

Implications for public relations personnel, as boundary spanners, are obvious. However, any public relations theory emerging from this structural-functional approach (which focuses on how organizations design their internal departments contingent on the environment) must be considered more normative than descriptive: previous studies have failed to support many hypotheses and the size of many correlation coefficients is small.6

Power-control. Robbins (1987, Chapter 8) contended that factors described above explain only about half of the variance in organizational structure.7 Although those factors (strategy, environment, size and technology) all may constrain the amount of discretion managers enjoy, their power allows them the room necessary to maneuver. Further, organizational politics

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frequently operates as an organic unit whereas production in that same organization typically is mechanistic.

6 For a results of a program of research based on this approach, see J. Grunig and L. Grunig, 1986.

7 One recent study on the relationship between power and model of public relations practiced seems to support this conclusion for the domain being studied here. See L. Grunig, 1987.

--reflected in power--explains the lack of rationality inherent in much contemporary organizational structure. Robbins (1987) argued that decisions about structure result from struggles between internal coalitions each arguing for a structural arrangement that best meets their own needs. He further explained that members of the power elite select both technologies and environments that they figure will help them maintain control--typically routine technology and a relatively stable environment.

Structure

Vertical structure. Recall that organizational structure encompasses two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. The former refers to a hierarchy of authority (Robbins, 1987).

Vertical structure is determined by four major variables: complexity, centralization, formalization and stratification (Hage, 1980, pp. 36-46). Complexity is measured by education of employees, their professionalism and the specialization of roles within the department. (It is most directly related to horizontal structure.) Centralization represents the degree to which decision making is concentrated at the top of the hierarchy. Formalization involves the existence of and adherence to written rules and regulations.8 Stratification represents the extent to which differences between ranks are emphasized.

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8 Recent theorizing has suggested "organizational culture" as a viable substitute for formalization. Robbins (1987, p. 362) reasoned that because it increases behavioral consistency and implies control without written documentation, culture may in fact be more effective because "culture controls the mind and soul as well as the body."

J. Grunig and Hunt (1984, p. 100) believed that these four variables would help predict the model of public relations an organization is likely to adopt. Their assumption led to at least one earlier study that characterized public relations departments in terms of their vertical structure. Schneider (aka L. Grunig, 1985), for example, found that structural components within the public relations department vary significantly by Hage-Hull organizational type. However, their commonalities outweigh their differences. For instance, centralized decision-making characterizes most departments included in her sample. Most departments are highly formalized as well. The majority operates under an organization chart that nearly everyone in the department follows. Most also have written job descriptions to which they adhere to a lesser degree.

Findings related to stratification are less consistent across all organizations. Although more than half of all respondents perceived some differences in status among the employees in their department, a third consider those differences to be overly conspicuous.

Dimensions of complexity also are mixed. For example, Schneider found a high level of education among most practitioners surveyed; and they described a similarly high level for others in their departments. However, relatively few are trained in the field of public relations. They lack education in the skills that would separate them from employees in less

complex departments. (Over half, though, expressed some degree of professionalism--slightly more than previous studies[9] predicted.) Further, the public relations departments investigated have relatively little specialization. Instead, generalists predominate--public relations practitioners who see their jobs as being almost evenly divided among responsibilities as different as media and government relations, who write for several channels (television, radio, newspapers, magazines and newsletters), and who attend both to internal and external audiences.

Horizontal Structure. Systematic determination of horizontal structure--a process that goes beyond casual observation or even experience--begins with a taxonomy of possibilities. J. Grunig and Hunt (1984, pp. 101-102) listed what their experience suggested were typical: structure by publics, by management process, by communication technique, by geographic region, by account executive system, by organizational subsystem and or by combination of these methods. All of these categories represent a division of labor within the public relations department on a single level of authority.

Schneider's (1985) last finding related to vertical structure, in particular, does not support J. Grunig and Hunt's (1984, p. 101) assertion that "structure by publics" is most common in business firms. This first of their seven types of

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9 See, for example, Ingram (1975); McKee, Nayman and Lattimore (1975); J. Grunig (1976); Wright (1976, 1979); and Werle (1980).

horizontal structure organizes the public relations department by publics that may include the media, the employees, the community, the government, the owners and any special interest groups opposing the organization. Schneider, though, found that most practitioners she surveyed considered themselves generalists whose bosses expected them to interact simultaneously with the media, community, government, stockholders and employees.

A second horizontal framework, "structure by management technique," organizes the work of the public relations department by such managerial processes as planning, evaluation, communication and research (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 102). J. Grunig and Hunt suggested that this structure also would be appropriate for business firms, especially those that have been decentralized and thus involve more people in decision-making.

"Structure by communication technique" involves organizing the PR department according to techniques such as audio-visual and print. J. Grunig and Hunt predicted that this structure would dominate in organizations with a stable environment or in organizations whose top brass considers public relations a relatively low-level, technical function.

A fourth horizontal structure, "by geographic region," sets up public relations components to serve each region, state, or country where the organization does business. J. Grunig and Hunt (1984, p. 102) pointed out that this structure typically operates in conjunction with one of the other structures. They also

considered it especially appropriate with environments that are complex because of their geographical dispersion.

The "account executive system," J. Grunig and Hunt reasoned, would be advantageous especially to consulting firms that assign different employees to each client. Its flexibility lends itself to different needs and structures of the client organizations.

"Structure by organization subsystem" is a variation of the account executive system described above. In essence, PR practitioners within an organization serve as account executives to other organizational subsystems. Their job is largely to publicize the activities of departments in their assigned "beats." J. Grunig and Hunt hypothesized that this structural approach would predominate in governmental and educational organizations.

The final horizontal structure J. Grunig and Hunt proposed is a "combination of methods." They deemed it the most common of all, contending that few organizations would design their PR departments using only one of the above-mentioned structures.

The preceding two-plus pages represent almost all that has been written to date on the horizontal structure of public relations departments. Suggestive though these ideas are, they have not been empirically verified--nor have alternative structures been proposed nor tested. Additional ways of organizing a public relations department may well exist. One final limitation is that they fail to consider other

organizational subsystems that also may deal with communication between organizations and their environments.

In some organizations, the public relations department encompasses issues management,10 government relations, employee communication, media relations, marketing and advertising. In others, of course, these functions are separated into distinct departments. Marketing and advertising, in particular, are often directly involved with public relations. Cutlip, Center and Broom (1985, pp. 88-89) contended that marketing, in fact, often is confused with public relations. They explained:

> Confusion results from notions that advertising is the sole province of marketing and publicity is the job of public relations. Advertising designed to establish, change, or maintain relationships with key publics (usually by influencing public opinion) should, by its nature and objectives, be supervised by the public relations department. It will require the advertising department's expertise to produce and place the advertisements, but the outcome sought has more to do with public relations than with promoting goods and services. Conversely, publicity about products and services designed to increase sales or use is clearly part of the marketing function. Because public relations staffers are typically more skilled at writing and placing publicity, they are enlisted to help with this aspect of the marketing effort.

Cutlip, Center and Broom (1985, p. 89) concluded that although marketing and public relations may be combined in a single department, separate offices for the two functions are

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10 One recent study explored the structural relationship between IM and PR. Wartick and Rude (1986) concluded that although related, the two functions should remain separate and clearly distinguishable within the organization. In so doing, each department has a higher profile than when integrated into a single public affairs/public relations office.

more common. They did not speculate on the typical structural relationship between advertising and public relations.

By looking at the relationship between marketing and public relations and between advertising and public relations, one can explore the interdependency between communication subsystems of the organizational system. This line of inquiry extends the knowledge of systems theory as it applies to public relations. It also should enhance the understanding of the horizontal distribution of tasks considered under the rubric of organizational public relations. As such, this study takes into account all communication functions--especially marketing and advertising--that might be considered part of public relations.

Establishing a list of typical horizontal structures that includes relationships between the public relations departments and other factions engaged in related communication activities undoubtedly is a Herculean task. But might it be impossible, if organizational systems and their subsystems are as unique as fingerprints?

Robbins (1987, pp. 204-205) explained that although organizations do exhibit unique configurations, they share <u>patterns</u> of structure for three main reasons. First, the natural selection model holds that the environment lends itself to only a few organizational forms. Second, organizations search for internal consistency--structural characteristics that work well together to be in synch with their environment. Finally, organizational structure is as much a victim of fashion as are

hemlines or hairstyles. That is, the number of viable configurations is limited to what is in vogue because managers are prone to follow what is trendy--be it participatory management, bureaucracy or matrix management.

Assumptions and Research Questions

The first logical question to pose is whether the J. Grunig-Hunt taxonomy of horizontal structures represents the universe of structures actually found in public relations departments. If not, what other structures exist? If so, which structures predominate? And, why is one structure--or combination of structures--chosen over another?

The assumption, gleaned from the admittedly thin body of suppositions about horizontal structure, is that "combination of methods" is most typical. Presumably, this is especially the case with organizations whose environments are the most complex: the organic and the mixed mechanical/organic.

It also might be the case, however, that organizations with the largest-scale environments--the mixed mechanical/organic and the mechanical--have the need for the most comprehensive public relations efforts possible. If so, one would expect to find a combination of several horizontal structures. Also, the relationship between public relations and other communication functions such as advertising and marketing might be more integral than in small-scale organizations: craft or organic. Mechanical organizations, in particular, might rely on a two- or three-pronged approach that includes PR, marketing and/or

advertising to help dispose of their products into the large market they typically enjoy.

If significant correlations emerge between horizontal structure and/or the involvement of public relations with other communication functions in the organization and the four Hage-Hull organizational types, one could assume that environment does dictate the structure of public relations programs. If not, then future research should consider other possible determinants. Since the Hage-Hull typology encompasses two of those possibilities (organizational size and technology), the most likely explanation would be either strategy or power-control.

METHODOLOGY

The global approach of this study included both in-depth personal interviews with public relations managers and a self-administered, eight-page questionnaire. Trained interviewers talked with two high-ranking individuals in each of 48 public relations departments.11 Interviews lasted between one and two hours. In addition, as Pavlik and Salmon (1983) recommended, current organizational publications such as company newsletters, annual reports, memoranda, organization charts, news releases and public service announcements were examined.

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11 In some cases, two PR practitioners were unavailable in a single organization. This was especially true in the mid-sized companies--those large enough to employ at least one public relations expert but too small for a comprehensive department. For this reason, the total number of respondents was 87 rather than the 96 possible if two practitioners had been available from all 48 organizations studied.

Forty-eight organizations in the Washington, DC, area (twelve representing each of the Hage-Hull types) were included in the purposive sample. Internal media and mass media were analyzed for an initial assessment of Hage-Hull organizational type.12 Traditional or craft types included a small hospital, a county police force and a professional basketball team. Mechanical organizations included the U.S. Air Force, a teachers' union and a power company. Organic organizations included a private school, a wholesaler and retailer of innovatiave running gear and a NASA subcontractor. Mixed mechanical/organic organizations included the world's largest teleprocessing network, a chemical manufacturer and an aerospace conglomerate.

Interviews, questionnaires and publications all contributed to the understanding of how horizontal structure varies by organizational type. The theorizing of Hage and Hull framed the study because their work suggests an explanation for whatever structure is exposed: the environment, in their opinion, dictates the structure for organizations in equilibrium with their suprasystem.

This combination of qualitative and quantitative research should provide for more powerful analyses than would either approach by itself (Stinchcombe, 1965; Sanders, 1982, p. 359). Although the historical-critical method contributed the bulk of

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12 All 48 organizations were deemed to be in equilibrium with their environments. That is, none was likely to go out of business at the time of the research. Since the Hage-Hull typology is a normative model, this assumption of stability is crucial.

the data here, the survey instrument helped guard against bias and subjective, perceptual data as reported by interviewees.

One major thrust of this descriptive study is determining what exists in terms of typical horizontal structures of public relations departments. Research findings described below also should relate those configurations to some preceding event or cause. The comprehensive methodology described above allows for such inferences of causality. The major disadvantage of the global method is that it limits the number of cases that can be studied. This inherent bias, in turn, limits the generalizability of conclusions.

FINDINGS

Horizontal structure

This exploratory study began with J. Grunig and Hunt's (1984) list of horizontal structures as possible answers to the following survey question: "How is the public relations department in your organization set up?" Response categories included by region of the country, by public (employees, community, stockholders, government, media, etc.), by technique (print, audiovisual, exhibits, etc.), by internal "client" (different departments such as R&D or production), by combination of the above (please also check all that apply), and other (please specify).13

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13 Because this question calls for objective answers, the survey instrument was chosen over the personal interview for more efficient analysis of responses. The questionnaire incorporated a brief description of what was meant by each type of horizontal structure.

Frequency responses show that, as predicted, a combination of methods is by far the most common horizontal structure (53%). The most typical combination is by public and by technique. Second most common is by public and by internal client and--mentioned equally frequently-- by communication technique and by client.

Other method was checked by 16% of the respondents. Their responses to this open-ended category include the following:

* all corporate or headquarters function
* no real public relations department
* no formal PR dept.
* management responsibility
* one professional does it all
* generalists who specialize as needed
* by type of media
* publications, media relations, editorial

These cryptic comments add little valuable information to the study. Only the last two (by type of media and publications, media relations, editorial) are descriptive enough to be useful. However, the fact that 16% of the survey respondents consider the structure of their public relations operation to be something other than the possibilities listed (as suggested by J. Grunig and Hunt, 1984, pp. 101-102) suggests further study.14

Next in frequency of response to the question of horizontal structure was by public (12%), followed by technique and internal client (5% each) and region of the country (4%). Because of the small number of respondents in each of these four categories (10,

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14 Of course, some respondents work in organizations with no real public relations department and so for them--the question may be irrelevant. Other practitioners checking the other option did not elaborate at all in the blank provided.

4, 4 and 3, respectively), the statistical procedures that would allow for generalizations by organizational type were not pursued. However, this initial investigation adds to what little is known about the way in which the work load is organized within public relations departments in general.

This information, though, must be interpreted in light of the following qualification: the two respondents in a single organization disagreed about their horizontal structure in twelve cases (one-quarter of the sample). This calls into question Blau and Schoenherr's (1971) contention that objective attributes of an organization could be answered adequately by any single member of that organization. As such, it represents one limitation of the study. At the same time, it may help explain why no more significant findings emerged.

Recognizing and identifying horizontal structure may be impossible because no clear-cut differentiation of tasks on the one level of authority exists. Perhaps public relations practitioners--even those working in the same department of the same organization--may not even agree on what public relations is. The following sections dissect the interaction between what is generally accepted as "public relations" and related functions that include marketing, advertising, development and public affairs.

Relationship to marketing

The job titles of many respondents allude to marketing as well as to public relations. Perhaps a close involvement with

marketing could distinguish one organizational type from another. Thus the connection between public relations and marketing was classified along a continuum from close to little or no relationship. The midpoint would indicate some involvement between the two departments in a given organization. Interview responses were coded according to these categories.15 A fourth category encompassed organizations with no marketing department or marketing function at all. Results are shown in Table 1.

The significance of the mean score, 2.51 on a 1-4 scale, is affected by the addition of a fourth category that is somewhat different from the degree of involvement indicated by the first three categories. However, the absence of any marketing activity allows for even less involvement than would be possible if the organization has a marketing department. So, in a sense, it can be considered a fourth degree of involvement. Because about a quarter of all respondents work in organizations with no marketing, this alternative seemed vital to include.

TABLE 1

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PR AND MARKETING

Extent of Relationship	Number	Percentage
1. Close	19	24%
2. Some	22	27%
3. Little or none	14	17%
4. No marketing department	21	26%

15 Because this question calls for perceptual data, the personal interview was deemed the more appropriate vehicle than the survey instrument for finding answers.

Looking at some examples of the rationale given for these responses provides a fuller picture of the relationship. An expression of a close relationship between public relations and marketing came from the manager of public relations at Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. He said: "In this company, public relations acts as aggressive support for the marketing effort. Our News Bureau is especially involved." The vice president for public relations of a PR and advertising firm described their close relationship as "cross-selling" between public relations and marketing. The director of the communications department of the Mormon Church said that whatever marketing done there is the responsibility of her department.16

A response typical of some involvement between public relations and marketing came from the public affairs manager at duPont's Washington office. He explained that although marketing is a separate, autonomous function within every manufacturing department, a public affairs representative is assigned to assist each one. The same is true at Satellite Business Systems, where public affairs provides an in-house counseling service to the Marketing Division.

At the American College of Cardiology, the communications department has little or no involvement in marketing. As its director of communications explained, "Marketing and other promotional activities are done by the concerned departments, not

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16 The only marketing the church does is what this interviewee termed the "soft sell" of the church's image.

by the communications department." This separation is common in almost one of every five organizations sampled.

Table 2 shows that significant differences exist between marketing and the four types of organizations ($p<.003$). Table 3 exposes the extent of the differences. Public relations departments in mechanical organizations tend to be significantly closer to the marketing function than are departments in any other organizational type (Tau=.21, $p<.01$). Public relations practitioners in traditional organizations, the other low-complexity type, are least involved with typical marketing functions (Tau=-.36, $p<.001$).

TABLE 2

MEAN SCORES OF MARKETING AND ADVERTISING VARIABLES BROKEN DOWN BY ORGANIZATIONAL TYPE

	Entire Population	Organizational Type			
	(N=76)	Craft (N=16)	Mechanical (N=20)	Organic (N=23)	Mixed (N=17)
Relationship to marketing F=5.08 (3 DF), $p<.003$	2.51	1.62	2.95	2.70	2.59
Relationship to advertising F=2.64 (3 DF), $p<.056$	2.53	1.94	2.90	2.70	2.41

Organizational publications collected during the interviews do nothing to dispute this finding or to add insight. However, respondents offered few publications with any marketing orientation. (Written materials that would be considered

marketing-oriented include consumer surveys, press releases about new products and direct-mail publicity or promotion.)

TABLE 3

CORRELATES OF MARKETING AND ADVERTISING VARIABLES WITH ORGANIZATIONAL TYPE (TAU)

Organizational Type	Relationship to Marketing	Relationship to Advertising
Traditional	-.36***	-.25**
Mechanical	.21**	.18*
Organic	.10	.09
Mixed	.02	-.05

***p<.001
**p<.01
*p<.10

These data help confirm the finding that pertains to all four types of organizations: fewer than a fourth of the public relations practitioners who responded indicated that they perceive a close relationship to marketing.

Relationship to advertising

Another way of exploring the interdependency of subsystems in an organization and to help determine the horizontal structure typical of public relations departments is to focus on the relationship between PR and advertising. As with marketing, the connection could be classified along a continuum from close to little or no relationship. The midpoint would indicate some interaction between these two functions. And as with the question related to marketing, a fourth category provided for interviewees whose organizations do no advertising. Results are as follows:

TABLE 4

RELATIONSHIP OF PR TO ADVERTISING

Extent of Relationship	Number	Percent
1. Close	19	24%
2. Some	20	25%
3. Little or none	19	24%
4. No advertising department	18	22%

As with marketing, responses are fairly evenly split among the four options. Mean is 2.53 on a 1-4 scale, again affected at least somewhat by the addition of the fourth category--one that is not truly comparable with the other three points on the scale. This mean is almost the same as that of the average involvement between public relations and marketing (2.51). This indicates that about the same level of involvement is typical between public relations and both marketing and advertising: the distinctions between functions are clear but some interaction is not unusual. In systems terms, the boundaries between the departments are semipermeable.

A response indicative of close involvement of public relations in advertising came from the director of public affairs at the American Red Cross. She explained that advertising is her responsibility because of the public-service nature of advertising the Red Cross does (especially for blood and health programs). At Goodyear, the public relations department is integrally involved in one of its two types of advertising: corporate image (handled completely by public relations), rather than product (where public relations has almost zero

responsibility). In small organizations, such as a NASA subcontractor, it is not unusual for advertising, public relations and even marketing to be handled by the same person.

Some involvement with advertising characterizes the larger public affairs office, such as that of Ford Motor Co. Although each function has its own vice president and is formally a separate operation there, public affairs becomes involved in the planning of advertising for what its director of Washington Public Affairs called "corporate image." Another response coded some involvement came from the public affairs administrator of Satellite Business Systems. He described the set-up there as follows:

> Advertising is a separate division under the vice president for National Networks. SBS also relies on a New York-based ad agency. Public Affairs, though, provides in-house consultation to advertising. For example, our department introduced the sentence, "We invite comparison" to focus attention on the advantages of its services and rates for long-distance telephone. Now, advertising has picked up this language and is beginning to use it.

Public relations departments in many other organizations, though, have little or no involvement in advertising--either because they are independent of their company's own advertising department or because the company relies on an ad agency.

Table 2 shows that organizational types vary significantly ($p<.056$) in terms of the involvement of their public relations departments in advertising. Correlations reported in Table 3 indicate that mechanical organizations, in particular, involve

their public relations staffs in advertising (Tau=.18, p<.05). Traditional organizations are the least likely to do so (Tau= -.25, p<.01). Organic and mixed types of organizations are not significant predictors of public relations involvement in advertising.

Two kinds of advertising are evident in the publications collected: institutional ads and public service announcements. At least one of the thirteen corporate image ads came from each type of organization. PSAs were somewhat more common: 25 in all and again, each type of organization contributed at least a few. This shows that many public relations practitioners are involved in work more typical of an advertiser, at least to some extent. In neither case, however, does the number, quality nor content seem to vary appreciably across organizations. As a result, an analysis of these advertisements does not add to any understanding of how public relations people in different kinds of organizations interact with their colleagues in advertising.

Relationship of PR to other communication functions

The survey instrument only assessed the relationship between public relations and advertising and marketing. During the in-depth interviews with practitioners, however, other relationships became apparent. This information carries important implications for the job satisfaction of respondents. This section presents representative remarks.

For example, a vice president in charge of public relations for a savings and loan company expressed his frustration at

"having to wear too many hats."17 The director of information for a public school system called his job "unmanageable" because it included public affairs as well as public relations. Because his work is "fragmented," the director of corporate relations for a multinational conglomerate felt frustrated. He explained that "public relations work is done in several departments, not under one umbrella."

Many practitioners in non-profit organizations, in particular, reported that their position includes fund-raising. The American Heart Association's director of public relations is typical. He explained that although he likes his work, he would be even more satisfied if a separate position could be created for public relations; he finds it difficult to do everything related to both development and public relations. In fact, practitioners in non-profit settings tended to complain that they are overworked in general because they lack the financial resources to hire the staff necessary for doing what one called "quality" work.18

CONCLUSIONS

Most public relations departments studied are organized by a combination of horizontal structures--predominantly by public, by

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17 To a few interviewees, however, "wearing many hats" leads to satisfaction because it creates a feeling of being essential. It also involves practitioners in a variety of tasks and with a variety of people and keeps them busy--additional determinants of job satisfaction (L. Grunig, 1987).

18 As a public relations practitioner at the Corcoran Art Gallery explained: "I enjoy my job, but it's frustrating to be understaffed. There's no time to really do a good job."

technique or by internal client. The predominance of this combined approach indicates an appropriate area for future research. Specifically, determining why certain types of structure tend to be used in combination with others would add to the body of knowledge about how the work in public relations is organized.

A very few interviewees reported a single horizontal structure. In these cases, 12% of the sample, that structure is by public (such as media, government, community or employee). However, 16% of the respondents did not recognize their division of labor as any one of the possibilities suggested in response to this question. This finding also suggests a fruitful area for future study: identifying alternatives to the taxonomy first enunciated by J. Grunig and Hunt (1984, pp. 101-102). Only one structure suggested, by type of media, makes sense on its face. If the model of public relations valued in the organization is public information, then concentrating on different media would be appropriate.

Findings related to the interdependence of public relations and marketing and advertising show approximately the same level of involvement in both cases. About half of all respondents said their department is significantly involved in marketing or advertising or both.

The relationship with marketing is most often characterized as supporting, assisting or counseling. It is most pronounced in the mechanical organization. This supports the contention that

structural-functionalism represents a valid way to study organizations. Apparently, disposing of products or services in a large-scale environment requires the involvement of more than a single subsystem, that of marketing or advertising. Conversely, public relations professionals in the small-scale operation characterized as "craft" or "traditional" have the least involvement in the kind of communication with customers or clients typically thought of as marketing.

Advertising undertaken by public relations practitioners, too, is most common in the large-scale, mechanical type of organization. Rather than product advertising, it tends to be of an image, institutional or public service nature. The role of the public relations department, typically, is more in planning than in production. Public relations is least involved in advertising in the traditional type of organization.

The relationship between PR and advertising/marketing correlates significantly with both Hage-Hull organizational types with low complexity--negatively in the case of traditional organizations and positively with mechanical ones. Scale of the environment alone, then, is not the significant predictor. If it were, all four types of organizations would show significant associations: PR's involvement with advertising and marketing would correlate significantly and positively with the mixed organizational type as well as with the mechanical and it would correlate significantly and negatively with the organic as well as with the traditional.

Instead, correlations are significant only with the low-complexity type. These organizations tend to be product--rather than service--oriented.19 Disposal of the products is paramount. The model of public relations that dominates in the traditional organization is press agentry. This persuasive model encompasses aspects of marketing and advertising, making the separation of these communication functions unnecessary.

Indeed, about one-fourth of the organizations in the sample have no marketing or advertising department. However, because of the predominance of organizations reporting interaction among these internal subsystems when they exist, systems theory is supported as a valid way of looking at public relations behavior in organizations.

However, the major assumption of the study was unsupported: that horizontal structure of public relations departments would vary significantly by Hage-Hull organizational type. This calls into question the environmental imperative. It also questions the efficacy of the J. Grunig-Hunt taxonomy of horizontal structures, of course. But the most important question is why no clear pattern of structure--much less relationship between structure and environmental niche--emerged.

To answer, first recall that in more than a few instances, two interviewees from a single organization disagreed in their

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19 Examples of traditional organizations included in the sample are a bagel bakery, a chain of printing establishments and an art gallery. Mechanical organizations included a supermarket chain, automobile and truck manufacturers and a department store chain.

determination of horizontal structure. Is structure unrecognizable even to the people working within it? Or is the way public relations actually is practiced--rather than the way it theoretically or normatively can be described--idiosyncratic, unique to each organizational system and even to the individual frame of reference of practitioners within the public relations subsystem?

The two questions are related. Perhaps the answer to the first query is "yes," horizontal structure is unrecognizable even to public relations practitioners working together in the same department. The reason it may unrecognizable is that those practitioners may not share an understanding of what public relations is. Their conception of the tasks involved in public relations may differ so radically as to call up completely different schemata when asked by an interviewer to define the allocation of those tasks in their office.

Given the spread of responsibilities many respondents described, this assumption warrants further study. To one practitioner, public relations may mean fund-raising as well as the more typical activities that include employee communication, media relations and counseling management. To another, PR may encompass legislative interaction as well as community and stockholder relations. Most significantly, those two practitioners may be colleagues in the same department.

Finally, the determination of horizontal structure may be an irrational one. Robbins (1987, p. 182) suggested that dominant

coalitions have the power to influence structural decisions. He further suggested that individual members of that power elite may not have a consistent set of goal preferences. In the case of horizontal structure in public relations, they may not consider all logical alternatives--much less select the most efficacious one. This would be most likely to happen if public relations practitioners are not represented in the dominant coalition.

IMPLICATIONS

The lack of clear-cut job responsibilities in the average public relations department studied presents several problems. In some cases, it leads to job dissatisfaction: ambiguity and overwhelming numbers of responsibilities upset the equilibrium of some practitioners interviewed. In other cases, the work that PR professionals do in a single department may overlap.

Perhaps most serious, a lack of enunciated responsibility may lead to gaps in the public relations program. If everyone in the department concentrates on fund raising, no one may be working with the community public. An emphasis on media relations may preclude important interaction with the government.

On the other hand, a lack of identifiable horizontal structure actually may strengthen the practice of public relations in some organizations. Formalized differentiation may create cumbersome, inflexible patterns of activity that interfere with the department's ability to respond quickly, inexpensively and effectively to changing environmental stimuli. An ad hoc horizontal structure--or a lack of structure--offers the

advantage of a simple, flexible, responsive approach to external dynamism. This is especially the case when the PR department is staffed with professionals--educated, experienced practitioners who can rise to the non-routine occasion and who would recoil from a more formalized configuration. These experts work well in teams, coordinating their efforts through mutual adjustment. Such unstandardized practice of public relations seems especially important when the department's environment is a dynamic, complex one.

The question, then, is whether any horizontal structure is incompatible with a public relations department in an organization whose environment is constantly in flux and whose employees have professional--rather than technical--capabilities. The answer suggested by the findings in this study is a qualified "no." Structure appropriate for the environment could be defined initially by a coalition or team of public relations experts--members of a department whose main concern is meeting organizational goals through the communication function broadly defined to include whatever other aspects are necessary--marketing, advertising, lobbying, etc. Members of the department should share an understanding, then, of what public relations <u>is</u>. Their definition would not be so general as to be unmanageable nor so narrow as to shut out two-way interaction with a range of relevant publics.

As long as the public relations professionals themselves have a hand in determining that structure, odds are that the

structure of choice may work well--at least for a time. Any structure or combination of structures adopted should be re-examined in light of significant changes in the environment. For example, structure by public may be the most appropriate when the company is new and growing by adding to its market share by cultivating customers. Later on, as it diversifies and moves into new markets, structure by geographical region may be important to factor into the structural equation. In other words, think of structure as a blueprint for a house that may need to be remodeled as the family's lifestyle shifts.

By considering alternative configurations--such as the J. Grunig-Hunt list or options mentioned by respondents to this study--managers of public relations programs should have a valid basis on which to structure their department compatible with its organizational environment, technology, goals and ideology.

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